

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-03

RSC-01 USIA-12 PRS-01 AID-20 OMB-01 CU-04 HEW-08 OS-03

RSR-01 /079 W

----- 105035

R 040915 Z APR 73

FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3974

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 KUALA LUMPUR 1425

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT

SUBJECT: POLITICAL TEMPERATURE RISES OVER LANGUAGE EXAMINATIONS
ISSUE

SUMMARY: POLITICAL TENSIONS ARE MOUNTING OVER HIGH RATE
OF FAILURES AMONG CHINESE OF MALAY LANGUAGE PORTION OF
NATIONAL SECONDARY SCHOOL (MCE) EXAMINATIONS. MCA LEADERS
ARE PRESSING PM RAZAK FOR REVIEW OF EXAMINATION SYSTEM AND
SPECIAL CONCESSIONS FOR OVER 14,000 CHINESE STUDENTS WHO
FAILED LANGUAGE EXAMINATION. MCA' S CREDIBILITY AS GOVERNMENT
PARTNER IS ALSO BEING PUT TO TEST. ALTHOUGH FINAL
OUTCOME OF DISPUTE IS NOT PREDICTABLE, THERE IS GENERAL
UNEASINESS AMONG CHINESE COMMUNITY ON ONE SIDE AND MALAY
ORGANIZATIONS ON THE OTHER. GOM LEADERSHIP NOW ATTEMPTING
FORGE ACCEPTABLE SOLUTION TO THORNY RACIAL PROBLEM. END
SUMMARY.

1. RELEASE OF RESULTS OF NATIONWIDE SECONDARY SCHOOL
EXAMINATIONS (MCE) DURING PAST FEW WEEKS HAS REVEALED
EXCEPTIONALLY HIGH RATE OF FAILURE BYCHINESE STUDENTS OF
BAHASA MALAYSIA PORTION OF EXAMINATION, THUS DISQUALIFYING
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THEM FOR HIGHER EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES. OF 27,784 NON- MALAYS WHO TOOK NATIONAL EXAMINATION, 14,166 FAILED BECAUSE OF LANGUAGE TEST; IN CONTRAST, ONLY 165 OUT OF 9,314 MALAYS FAILED THIS PORTION OF EXAM. ON OBJECTIVE LEVEL, HIGH RATE OF FAILURES CAN BE ASCRIBED TO (A) LOW QUALITY OF MALAY LANGUAGE TEACHING IN MANY SCHOOLS, (B) VAGUENESS OF SYLLABUS ON WHICH EXAMINATION IS BASED, (C) STANDARDS FOR LANGUAGE EXAM WERE TOO HIGH, AND (D) STANDARDS FOR GRADING WERE TOO RIGID (IN PRIOR YEARS, SOME ALLOWANCE WAS MADE FOR STUDENTS IN ENGLISH AND CHINESE (SCHOOLS). EMOTIONS HAVE BEEN HEIGHTENED, FUELED BY INTIMATIONS OF OUTRIGHT DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHINESE STUDENTS, MANIPULATION OF EXAM PAPERS, AND CHARGES OF ARBITRARINESS ON PART OF LARGELY MALAY EDUCATIONAL SPECIALISTS WHO DREW UP THE EXAMINATION.

2. POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE PREDICTABLY CRITICIZED GOVERNMENT FOR HIGH RATE OF FAILURES AND LOW QUALITY OF MALAY TEACHING. MCA, DAP, PPP, PEKEMAS AND GERAKAN, ALL REPRESENTING SEGMENTS OF CHINESE COMMUNITY, HAVE CALLED FOR REGRADING OF EXAMINATION PAPERS AND OTHER EXCEPTIONS FOR CHINESE STUDENTS WHO FAILED. GOVERNMENT RESPONSE, IN FORM OF REPORT ISSUED BY EDUCATION MINISTRY ON APRIL 4, INDICATES THAT GOVERNMENT IS ONLY WILLING TO ALLOW UNSUCCESSFUL STUDENTS TO SIT FOR EXAMINATIONS NEXT YEAR AND TO INVESTIGATE QUALITY OF LANGUAGE TEACHING.

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RSC-01 USIA-12 PRS-01 AID-20 OMB-01 CU-04 HEW-08 OS-03

RSR-01 /079 W

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R 040915 Z APR 73

FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3975

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 KUALA LUMPUR 1425

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

3. WHILE OPPOSITION PARTIES HAVE THUS FAR BEEN LIMITED TO CALLS FOR GOVERNMENT ACTIONS, MCA CREDIBILITY IS BEING SERIOUSLY CHALLENGED AND MCA IS INITIATING MOVES WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT TO SECURE ADDITIONAL CONCESSIONS. BOTH OLD AND YOUNG GUARD FACTIONS OF MCA HAVE REACTED UNFAVORABLY TO HALF- MEASURES PROPOSED BY EDUCATION MINISTER HUSSEIN ONN AND MCA PRESIDENT TAN SIEW SIN IS MEETING WITH PM RAZAK TO FIND SOLUTION POLITICALLY ACCEPTABLE TO CHINESE. ACCORDING TO SPECIAL FUNCTIONS MINISTER LIM KENG YAIK, AT MINIMUM MCA WANTS REGRADING OF EXAM PAPERS, REVISION OF LANGUAGE TEST STANDARDS, AND REVIEW OF ENTIRE EXAMINATION SYSTEM. LIM ALSO TOLD EMBOFF THAT THIS ISSUE MAY FINALLY SHATTER ANY CONFIDENCE CHINESE MAY HAVE LEFT IN MCA AND THAT MCA WILL BE " FINISHED" AS ALLIANCE PARTNER IF MALAY INTRACTABILITY ON THIS ISSUE IS NOT OVERCOME.

4. ON UMNO' S SIDE, ANY RELAXATION ON EXAMINATION ISSUE OTHER THAN MEASURES ALREADY ANNOUNCED BY EDUCATION MINISTRY WILL BE DICEY. UMNO YOUTH IN PARTICULAR IS CERTAIN TO OPPOSE (IN MOST VOCIFEROUS MANNER POSSIBLE) ANY ADDITIONAL CONCESSIONS, AND PM RAZAK WILL BE FORCED TO INVOKE STRINGENT PARTY DISCIPLINE IF MEASURES MORE FAVORABLE TO CHINESE ARE TAKEN.
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AT THIS JUNCTURE, HOWEVER, THERE IS NO PRECISE READING OF PM RAZAK' S ATTITUDES ON THIS MATTER ON EXTENT TO WHICH HE WILL BE ABLE TO COMPROMISE IN ORDER TO SAVE MCA FROM A PUBLIC BLACK EYE.

5. JOCKEYING HAS UP TO NOW BEEN CONFINED TO POLITICAL ARENA AND THERE IS NO RPT NO EVIDENCE OF CIVIL DISTURBANCES OR OTHER MASS ACTION. DEMONSTRATION OF ABOUT 50 CHINESE STUDENTS AT EDUCATION MINISTRY THIS MORNING WAS FIZZLE; NO POLICE RIOT SQUADS WERE PRESENT AND STUDENTS VOLUNTARILY DISPERSED AFTER SHORT TIME.

6. EMBASSY' S ASSESSMENT AT PRESENT IS THAT THE CURRENT STORM WILL NOT LIGHTLY BE WEATHERED AND THAT DEPTH OF FEELING AMONG MCA LEADERS MAY MOVE PR RAZAK TO MORE FORTHCOMING ACTION. EXTENSIVE PUBLIC VENTING OF VIEWS, THIS TIME WITH OPPOSITION PARTIES FULLY JOINING IN FRAY, WILL OCCUR WHEN PARLIAMENT RESUMES ON APRIL 17; IN THIS SITUATION, GOVERNMENT

MAY FIND IT EXPEDIENT TO MOVE TO COOL OFF TEMPERS BEFORE THEN.
LYDMAN

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*** Current Handling Restrictions *** n/a

*** Current Classification *** CONFIDENTIAL

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: n/a
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 04 APR 1973
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: golinofr
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973KUALA01425
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: RR
Errors: n/a
Film Number: n/a
From: KUALA LUMPUR
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19730431/aaaahltx.tel
Line Count: 175
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: golinofr
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21 NOV 2001
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <21-Nov-2001 by martinml>; APPROVED <17-Dec-2001 by golinofr>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: <DBA CORRECTED> gwr 971119
Subject: POLITICAL TEMPERATURE RISES OVER LANGUAGE EXAMINATIONS ISSUE
TAGS: PINT, ID, PINT
To: CINCPAC
EA
JAKARTA
SECSTATE WASHDC
SINGAPORE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005

